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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 NEW DELHI 002447

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SUBJECT: GOI APPLAUDS PRESIDENT'S AF-PAK SPEECH (ESPECIALLY THE PAK PART)

REF: NEW DELHI 2435 (INDIAN PUNDITS REACT TO SPEECH)

Classified By: A/DCM Uzra Zeya. Reasons: 1.4 (b,d).

¶1. (C) In a December 4 meeting, MEA Joint Secretary for Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran Affairs Y.K. Sinha expressed general appreciation for the President's speech, stating that it refuted speculation that the international community was looking to make a hasty exit from the region. Apart from his overall positive take on the USG approach, Sinha - a functional equivalent of an assistant secretary and the GOI's top policy point man on Af-Pak issues - expressed concern that the mention of a July 2011 starting date for transition of forces could lead the Taliban to undertake a strategic pause and wait out international forces, only to reappear on the scene in force once the transition is underway. He stated, however, his appreciation for the USG approach to calibrate the transition according to conditions on the ground. He also questioned whether the strategy adequately addresses "the fact that the source of the problem is on the other side of the Afghanistan border," and opined that eliminating terrorist safehavens in Pakistan will take far beyond 2011 or even 2014. Echoing familiar GOI skepticism, Sinha questioned Pakistan's will to eliminate extremist sanctuaries and he alleged that TTP leadership and al Qaeda had largely escaped GOP offensives in Waziristan and Swat and had moved elsewhere in country, namely Karachi. Sinha intoned that Afghan Taliban numbers are augmented by support they receive from Pakistan. He stressed the importance of dispelling any Pakistani perception that India is playing a negative role in Afghanistan.

¶2. (C) Grousing that the speech made no overt mention of India, Sinha emphasized that India stood ready to do more in Afghanistan, particularly in areas such as capacity building and training of Afghan personnel in India. Prefacing his remark by stating that he was "thinking out loud," he asked that the USG and the Afghan government consider asking India how it can assist more in Afghanistan "without sending troops to help." Such assistance, in Sinha's view, could logically include GOI training of Afghan police and military units in India, though he readily conceded that India understood USG sensitivities on this issue and that he was not reflecting GOI policy.

¶3. (U) On December 3, the Indian Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) released the following statement regarding the President's December 1 speech on the way forward in Afghanistan and Pakistan. We transcribe the text verbatim:

Begin MEA Statement:

We have noted US President Obama's speech at West Point on December 1, 2009 and the announcement that 30,000 additional

US troops would be deployed in Afghanistan in the first part of 2010. We welcome the emphasis in the US strategy on the strengthening of the Government of Afghanistan and the Afghan security forces. We also welcome President Obama's reiteration of the need to squarely tackle terrorism, and for Pakistan to ensure that terrorists do not enjoy safe havens on its territory. India believes that it is in the interest of the international community to impress upon Pakistan that it must use all its influence and resources to implement its commitments to dismantle the infrastructure of terrorism and to deny sanctuary to all terrorist groups who operate from its soil.

In our view, it is essential that the international community shows unwavering commitment in resolutely opposing, resisting and overcoming terrorism and those who nurture, sustain and give sanctuary to terrorists and extremist elements. It is also imperative that the international community shows sustained and long-term commitment to assisting the Government and people of Afghanistan.

India for its part has attempted to help Afghanistan in its reconstruction efforts as a means to bringing stability in that country. Our assistance, now over USD 1.3 billion, is spread across Afghanistan and spans almost the entire gamut of economic and social developmental activities. Despite daunting logistical and security challenges, two major GOI-funded infrastructure projects have been completed - construction of the 218 km road from Zaranj to Delaram in Nimroz province and the construction of the 220 KV Transmission Line from Pul-e-Khumri to Kabul together with

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the sub-station at Chintala. Construction of Afghanistan's new Parliament building, a symbol of the common commitment of both countries to pluralism and democracy, is also progressing. India reiterates its determination to fulfill its commitment to the Afghan people and Government as they build a peaceful, democratic and pluralistic Afghanistan.

End MEA Statement.

14. (C) Comment: The President's calls for denial of safe-havens to al Qaeda in the Afghanistan-Pakistan border region played extraordinarily well in India. It is equally apparent from the statement and Sinha's reference to Pakistan as an "incubator of terrorism" that the GOI believes that the speech validates its stated insistence that Pakistan dismantle terror infrastructure and take action against perpetrators of terror directed toward India before it resumes meaningful talks with Islamabad. It is also clear, with India's emphasis on its readiness to do more in Afghanistan and Sinha's floating of NSF and ANA training in-country, that we need to offer the Indians more specifics on how we envision their role and U.S. red lines. End Comment.
ROEMER